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SUBJECT: GERMAN GOVERNMENT TAKES STEPS TO BLOCK RUSSIAN ARMS SHIPMENT TO VENEZUELA

REF: 06 BERLIN 2828

Classified By: EMIN Robert A. Pollard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: On the basis of information presented to the German Government by the Portuguese Embassy in Berlin, the German Government has taken initial steps to block a shipment of Russian rockets and related materials bound for Venezuela's Defense Ministry. The shipment was scheduled to take place November 15-17. The German MFA has informed the Russian Embassy in Berlin that Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport is required by Germany's War Weapons Control Act to apply for a transit license. Given the German Government's strict limitations on arms exports to Venezuela, MFA officials tell us, it is highly unlikely the German Economics Ministry would grant such a license. German Government officials were taken by surprise by the Portuguese information and are conducting a review of internal procedures and investigating whether past arms shipments from Russia to Venezuela have transited Germany. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C/NF) German MFA Director General for Economic Affairs Ruediger von Fritsch contacted EMIN late on November 14 to report that, according to sources in the Portuguese Embassy in Berlin, a Russian plane transporting rockets and related equipment to Venezuela was due to transit Leipzig, Germany on the early morning of November 16. The plane was due to depart Celjabinsk (Siberia) on November 15, and arrive in Maracay, Venezuela on November 17. Von Fritsch explained the flight would also refuel in the Azores en route. Von Fritsch said the MFA had contacted the Russian Embassy in Berlin to ask for a clarification and had told the Russian Embassy that, if the information turned out to be true, German authorities would inspect the plane upon its arrival in Leipzig. Von Fritsch reported that the Russian exporter - Rosoboronexport - had not filed an application for a transit license. Under paragraph 3 of Germany's War Weapons Control Act (Kriegswaffenkontrollgesetz, or KWKG), a transit license is required for weapons shipments transiting German territory.

¶3. (C/NF) According to information provided to the MFA by the Portuguese Embassy, the intended recipient is the Venezuelan Defense Ministry. The shipment will be transported by two AN-124-100 aircraft from Volga-Dnepr airlines (callsign VDA 6242/6243). The original flight schedule was:

- Depart Celjabinsk, Russia on November 15 at 0800 GMT
- Arrive Leipzig, Germany on November 16 at 0230
- Depart Leipzig, Germany on November 16 at 0500
- Arrive Lajes (Azores), Portugal on November 16 at 1100
- Depart Lajes (Azores), Portugal on November 17 at 0530

- Arrive Maracay, Venezuela on November 17 at 1330

The Portuguese Embassy information indicated the Russian Embassy in Lisbon submitted an application for landing and overflight clearance to the Portuguese Government on October 130.

¶4. (C/NF) In a follow-on meeting November 15 with emboffs, MFA Conventional Export Control Division Deputy Director Christof Pollmeier said the MFA and the Economics Ministry - the licensing authority for all munitions-related export and transit licenses - were taken by surprise by these developments. Pollmeier said the KWKG requires the Economics Ministry to apply the same criteria to export licenses and transit license applications. Given Germany's "very strict criteria" on arms exports to Venezuela (see reftel), Pollmeier said he could not imagine the German Government would issue a transit license for the Russian shipment. Pollmeier noted that the Economics Ministry generally takes a minimum of one to two weeks to process license applications.

¶5. (C/NF) Pollmeier said the MFA had not yet received a formal response from the Russian Embassy. When originally contacted on November 14, Russian Embassy officials told the MFA that the shipping company had satisfied German legal requirements by applying for overflight clearance and landing rights in Leipzig. The Russian Embassy did not offer a response to the MFA's query on whether Rosoboronexport had applied for a German transit license. Pollmeier said the Russian shipping company had postponed the flight for 24 hours, but insisted that, regardless of when the flight might land in Germany, the German Government would not permit the flight to depart without the requisite transit license. He reiterated that the Economics Ministry would likely not grant such a license.

¶6. (C/NF) In response to a question, Pollmeier said it was not clear whether the Russian Embassy was truly unaware of the KWKG requirements or whether they were feigning ignorance of the requirement. (COMMENT: We find it hard to believe that neither the GOR nor Rosoboronexport were aware of the German regulations. END COMMENT.) In either case, Pollmeier said, the MFA believes there is a high probability that other Russian arms shipments bound for Venezuela (and elsewhere) have transited Germany without the German Government's knowledge. Pollmeier said the Portuguese Embassy hinted similar shipments had transited the Azores before, but the MFA is not yet sure whether those shipments transited Germany. The German Government is in the process of reviewing internal coordination procedures between relevant ministries - i.e., to ensure German offices issuing landing permits and overflight clearances flag cases of concern for the relevant German authorities - and investigating previous shipments. Pollmeier said the German Government would heighten its vigilance and scrutiny in the future.

¶7. (C/NF) Pollmeier said information received from the Portuguese Embassy indicated the shipment contains "rockets" and consists of approximately 800-850 wooden crates weighing seven tons. Pollmeier said the MFA had not received more specific information on what types of goods were included in the shipment. Pollmeier said the MFA will share any additional information and will share the information with us, including copies of any documents submitted by Rosoboronexport. He said the German Government would also welcome any U.S. information about possible past shipments to Venezuela that may have transited Germany. Pollmeier said the MFA informed the Portuguese Government of its intent to brief the USG. Post will continue to monitor and report further developments.

¶8. (C/NF) COMMENT: While it may be unsettling to learn that shipments of Russian arms may have transited Germany in the past without coming to the attention of German intelligence or security authorities, instances of stovepiping within the German Government are all too common. We will continue to urge Germany to take this case as a wake-up call and to take

appropriate steps to heighten scrutiny of shipments
transiting Germany bound for countries of concern. END
COMMENT.

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